
Osburn

Fuels Assessment

Areas within the one mile of home sites:

The community of Osburn is located in the I-90 corridor between Wallace and Kellogg. Homes and businesses are generally in a concentrated cluster near the interstate, with steep hillsides rising from the community edge to the hillsides 2,000 feet above the city. Scattered mining enterprises are located in the valleys to the south of Osburn with dead-end gravel roads accessing a few hundred yards up



each hill. Forests in these areas are characteristically north facing habitat types dominated by many tree species including western red cedar, western white pine, Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, and grand fir. Forest health is generally good, with a few pockets of dead or dying trees, but not the extent found in other areas in the county.



Forest management activities on the hillslopes south of Osburn have thinned out the forestlands to leave healthy dominant and co-dominant trees with little underbrush. While some of these areas have logging debris still on the site, prescribed burning of these units will serve to

eliminate this ground fuel risk. The remaining forestlands in this area are characterized by fire behavior fuel model 8 with deviations into model 10 and even 11, although these latter two are represented only in scattered locale on this hillside.

The slopes to the north of Osburn were not subjected to the same forest fires as those to the east nor to the same environmental challenges as those to the west, resulting in a fully forested hillside. This south aspect is dominated by ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir with scattered shrubs in the understory. Because of the hotter exposure to direct sunlight, the forest habitat is much drier than



that across the valley on north facing aspects. The fire behavior fuel model in much of this area is 2, with some areas characteristic of model 5.

Areas within 3 miles of the community center, but outside the one mile home zone:

The lands beyond the one-mile buffer of Osburn home sites are federally managed forestlands that encompass the peak of the east-west running ridges in this area. The forests are characteristic of the high elevation woodlands with past evidence of fire scars, forest health challenges, and wide expanses of continuous forest cover. Most of the lands in this zone are well roaded with access provided from the I-90 corridor as well as from points to the north and south.

Community Risk Assessment

The community of Osburn had 1,579 residents as of the census of 2000. Although this community is concentrated in a definable city, there are many smaller communities immediately surrounding this concentration of homes. These communities include Silverton, Terror Gulch, Sunnyslope, Big Creek, and parts of Moon Creek. There are

roughly 1,179 buildings within 3 miles of the city center (inclusive of the listed sub-communities). Out of these 1,179 structures, nearly 611 are considered to be at high-risk to wildfire. These structures are outside of the community center (averaging 0.85 miles from city center), along the edge of the community, and scattered in the river drainages and forested areas surrounding the area of Osburn.

Both Shoshone County Fire District 1 (east side) and Shoshone County Fire District 2 (west side) provide rural fire protection for structures in this area. Wildland fire protection for this area is provided by the Idaho Department of Lands in Cataldo.

Osburn

The city of Osburn is a concentration of homes and businesses located mainly to the south of I-90. The southwestern perimeter of this community defines the wildland-urban interface for these residents. Unlike most communities in this county, homes and businesses are not densely concentrated along the forested slopes that rise from the valley floor. For the most part, structures in this city are set back from the forest edge providing a very defensible zone against a possible wildfire on this hillside.



This practice of maintaining the buffer zone is highly recommended and encouraged as these buffer lands between the flammable forests and structures provide a reliable protection against casualty loss in the event of a wildfire.



The exception to this is found along the city perimeter in the southwestern quarter of Section 18 (SW¼ SW¼, S18, T48N R4E) where homes are encroaching on this interface (from 1st Street to the southeast). This proximity to the forest is coupled with risky homeowner practices such as firewood stacks against wood siding (on the side of the forest), a continuous tree layer from the forest

through the home site with branches overhanging wooden decks and wood siding, and similar practices. This highest risk area is only 2,200 feet long and would benefit from the combination of (1) homeowners reducing their individual risk factors (such as those listed above) and (2) the creation of a community defensible zone that extends into the forest at a distance of 200 feet (10 acres). In this zone, the forest should be lightly thinned to remove dead and dying trees, the understory shrubs cut, tree branches pruned to a height of 15 feet or more, and the rubbish hand piled and burned, or chipped. A dirt fire line should be constructed around the perimeter of this fire break.

This area is specifically targeted for the community of Osburn for a number of reasons. First, the predominant direction of fire spread in this region is from the southwest to the northeast meaning that a fire that ignites on the south side of the ridge south of Osburn has the potential to spread in the direction of the community and threaten homes along this edge. Second, this area is



important from the standpoint of being the watershed for the city water supply. Third, a

house fire or community based fire-start near these homes has the potential to burn uphill to this hillside igniting the forest. This mitigation activity has the potential to reduce the risk of fire casualty loss.

Silverton



Silverton is located between Osburn and Wallace on the north side of I-90. This small community is home to the historic Wallace Ranger District headquarters of the US Forest Service. It is also a community nestled into the embrace of the forest. This woodland-embrace has served to increase specific risk factors for the residents of this community as many homes are at

high risk to wildfire loss. The entire perimeter of the community, with the exception of those structures within a few hundred feet of I-90 are at risk.

Additionally, the forestlands beyond the immediate community boundary have some risk factors that include reduced forest health, limited access (and thus the only escape route for residents is to the interstate), and steep slopes which could aid forest fire rates of spread.

Within the community, residents should reduce individual home site



risk factors such as: stack firewood away from flammable structures, eliminate tall and cured grasses next to structures, remove dead and dying trees from the immediate location of structures, and thin and prune healthy trees around homes.



The entire community should have a defensible zone constructed around it that provides a fire break to prevent the movement of a fire between the forest and the homes. Although this community is rather concentrated into less than a square mile, the entire perimeter would benefit from a fire break extending at a 200 foot width for a total distance of 9,500 feet (excluding the southern boundary where the interstate is located). This would represent a total of almost 44 acres of treatment. Although this is extensive, the fire break would be able to take advantage of natural fuel breaks, openings and fields, and roadways. In addition, the fuel break would not

have to be a drastic treatment as the treated area would concentrate on removing ground fuels, pruning trees, piling and disposing of the debris through chipping or burning. The outer perimeter would need a dirt fire line constructed.

Beyond the borders of the community and this community defensible zone, the federal land managers responsible for the management of these adjoining lands should consider forest management activities on the surrounding hillsides targeted at improving forest health and reducing fire risk to this community and those surrounding it.

Sunnyslope & Terror Gulch

The community of Sunnyslope holds a singular distinction as being one of the few communities in this county built above the valley floor. Although this real estate provides scenic views of the surrounding landscape, it also provides increased risk of wildfire loss from fires igniting below the community that spread uphill. Access to this area is provided through Terror Gulch where over 40



structures are located. The access to Sunnyslope and to the homes in Terror Gulch is short (less than a mile), and not at high risk to wildfire.



However, the lands on the west side of Terror Gulch represent some degree of risk as past forest management activities in this area have left logging debris and brush fields that if ignited could provide embers and firebrands that would ignite dry fuels surrounding these homes. In addition, the private lands where the debris was created has roads that would be difficult for forest

fire fighting equipment to traverse in order to access the BLM and US Forest Service lands that are located to the west and north of this parcel. The roadway is partially eroded from inadequate drainage structures, it is narrow—suitable only for a pickup truck, and has many tight turns with limited turnouts. This road is a prime access point to fight wildfires that are located in 8 square miles to the north of I-90. Any fire in this

location would likely threaten homes in Terror Gulch and Sunnyslope. Because of these factors, it is highly recommended that the US Forest Service, the BLM, and the private landowner cooperate to improve the running surface of this road so that it can be used reliably in the case of a wildfire.

The homeowners in Terror Gulch are mostly located near the stream with access provided across single family bridges. These bridges should be evaluated and rated with weight limits posted on the bridges and kept on record at the county fire district 1 office and the IDL Cataldo office. These homes are at a low to moderate fire risk with the exception of the need for defensible zones around each home.

In the community of Sunnyslope, the risk factors are generally moderate. The forest surrounding this community is dominated by young ponderosa pine with an understory of grasses and forbs. While most of the homes are surrounded by a 'green buffer' of lawns or paved road surfaces, some are placed in a sea of branches and shrubs. A defensible



zone around this community would be created by pruning the forests surrounding the perimeter of the homes on the outer ring of the neighborhood.

The few homes surrounded by flammable materials on all sides would benefit from the obvious treatments of a defensible space, improved access, and reduced home

site risk factors. Debris created from these treatments could either be hand piled and burned for chipped. The selection of the treatment method would depend on available funds, the time of the year, and the acres treated.

